

The March of the 43d Light Infantry in 1837

THE LATE 104TH REGIMENT IN 1813

ALSO:

ON THE

FROM THE BRITISH ISLES TO CANADA

BY A. W. PLAYTON

[illegible]

W O S I A 9 M O 3

To the Editor of the British Standard.

Sir,—In your issue of the 15th inst., you favoured us with a brilliant eulogium from the *New York Herald*, on the winter march of the 43rd Light Infantry from Fredericton, in New Brunswick, to Quebec, in the year 1837,—which the Iron Duke said “was the only military achievement performed by a British officer that he really envied.” Permit me, Sir, as the last officer on the half-pay list of the late 104th Regiment, to make a few remarks, by way of comparison, between the march of the above Regiment, in 1837, and the late 104th Regiment, in the war of 1812. The narrative says, “the 43rd were provided with moccasins and two blankets each, and sleds for the conveyance of the men, each holding eight.” The 104th were provided with a pair of snow-shoes, moccasins, and one blanket each, and one tobogan (Indian sleigh) to every two men. “The train of the 43rd (each company) consisted of 14 double-horse sleighs, containing eight men, provisions, ammunition, and baggage, the latter limited to one portmanteau and one carpet-bag to each officer.” The train of the 104th (one company) consisted of upwards of 50 tobogans, containing one or two barrels and accoutrements, two blankets, one blanket, and at one period of the march, 14 days’ provisions for two men (each ration one pound of cornmeal) and two half-ounces of tea, until we left the settlement, drawn by one man in front, and pushed, or held back, as necessary required, by one in the rear, by a rope fast to the stern of the tobogan, Indian fashion. “The officers of the 43rd were limited to one portmanteau and one carpet bag.” The officers of the 104th to a knapsack, carried by themselves, unless they could obtain a dog that would work in harness. The gentleman, General Moodie, who was shot by the rebel natives near of Toronto, had a Newfoundland dog that performed that service for him; and a favorite special constable followed me. “On the 11th of November, 1837, the first division of the 43rd Light Infantry, 80 strong, including the commanding officer, Col. Halket, and his staff, commenced their march.” On the 14th of February,

1812, the first division of the late 104th, 100 strong, under Col. Halket, with four Indian guides, started from Fredericton. The loyal inhabitants treated us with their double sleighs, and carried each division, one day on their journey voluntarily; giving us three cheers at parting, which were returned by stout hearts and willing minds. “Each succeeding day a fresh company set out, following in the footsteps of the preceding one, until the six divisions, comprising altogether 22 officers and 452 men, were on the wing into the bleak and barren interior.” Likewise, each succeeding day a company of the 104th, 100 strong, until 10 divisions, comprising 42 officers and 1000 men, were set on the wing, but on snow-shoes, without a track, or mark on a tree, for a march of some hundred miles, with from four to six feet of snow under their feet, a dense forest in front, and naught but the canopy of Heaven over their heads. The narrative tells of the sprinkling of farm houses, cottages, and farms, and the fare which they furnished at the end of the march to the famished men, was ample and good of its kind; and when beyond the settlement, they had log huts to sleep in (common Indian shanties). “If there was not a settlement of men between them the 43rd came through in 1837, I have no readers to judge how few and far between they must have been in 1812—24 years before. The 104th had difficulties of their own, and no one to help them for night. The first thing we attended to was to huddle everything for fear of a snowstorm, then cut out the snow with our snow-shoes, which apparatus looked like so many oblong collars; we then stuck up brush at the sides and ends, cutting steps in the snow for our open doors. The men cut down hard-wood and conveyed the same on sledges, some of the timber was hauled on the sleds requiring 12 or 14 men on snow-shoes to carry the logs from the camp to the camp. We then laid a thick coating of fine cedar or hemlock bark to be on, then the snow, the camp bottom was then hung on, some for pork, and some for tea, coffee, or chocolate; and at noon or night, a convenient change was made in the pork and bread. This went on daily for a while, reducing the carriage of

provisions at an alarming rate. The share of the fire was our width only, and we might turn which ever side we liked; and to tell the truth, we sometimes kept turning the whole night, whilst the snow walls stood like marble, although some of our log-piles were 14 feet long and four feet high. The evenings were spent in cheerful conversation; and bursts of laughter were frequently heard from camp to camp—all good humour, happen what would—although it may be the brush which had overhung too much would take fire, and leave only the naked walls for the rest of the night, as was the case in the officers' camp, the colours of the regiment having a very narrow escape. The bugle sounded two hours before day, to cook and eat (which towards the last was very ample time); and we moved off as soon as it was light enough to see that we did not leave anything behind. The 43rd complained of the "resinous smoke, so that they had to leave their hats;" this circumstance did not inconvenience the 104th, as they had no need to prevent its ascension. They also complained of the rough road. We had no road to complain of, but marched on the rivers and lakes, the country being in a state of nature, except when obliged to make a portage past falls or stiff rapids, until we left the Thimiquette Lake. We then followed an Indian trail over the great portage that divides the waters that run into the St. Lawrence and Bay of Fundy, which we crossed over a fallen tree, carrying our baggage, as the snow had become so thickly packed, that the vent our sliding, and long as we kept on the track, a mis-step would mean to the clin. Our poor Indians, with empty stomachs, had hard work hauling the tobaggans up the steep bank, although the load was light in comparison, as the provisions were all finished, and we had been on short allowance some days; yet in the night of our privations, we had some hearty laughs. Some of the men would roll the tobaggans down the hills, sitting on them, and would frequently capsize. Our big black drummer straddled on his drum, which was lashed on a tobagan, to try the experiment, but it got off the track, throwing him off at a high velocity, and the white African came up some distance from where he disappeared, a white man, smiling with his tongue out, was the worst part of our misadventure; all this time in the open air at each of our camps, the

thermometer sometimes 20° below zero, with continued exercise, produced voracious appetites, and one pound of pork, including bones, with 10 ounces of biscuit, came very far short of what was absolutely necessary to supply the cravings of nature for 24 hours (how inconsistent, if we had been marching in dog days, we should have had the same rations). Hunger took such hold of their thoughts that there was no conversation towards the last, from morning to night, and I may add, from night until morning, but about Christmas dinners, roast beef, plum puddings, turkeys, and geese, brandy, rum, and gin; but to their credit, there was no grumbling, but all were cheerful and good tempered although they were without their usual rations of rum, from the commencement of the march. At the foot of the grand portage, I relieved my dog, by throwing away my tobagan, as I could easily carry all my provisions, consisting of a half-pound cake of chocolate, which I ate in the solid for my breakfast, put on my knapsack, and slung my snow-shoes over the top, regimentally. No dinner that day, no supper that night, no breakfast next morning; but in the afternoon, we were agreeably surprised, when crossing the Rivière du Loup, to find two men, with bags of biscuits and two tubs of spirits and water, handing each a biscuit and about half a pint of grog. I found it very acceptable after a march of two days, and a fast of upwards of 36 hours. It was now my turn to be relieved, and the contractor who told us there was provisions for the Indians at the next house. We stopped but two miles further, and found a small log-house, and very kindly asked the woman to partake some of the provisions. She immediately put on a four-pound loaf, a quarter of mutton, and a bottle of wine. These soon disappeared, and we asked for more; but to our great astonishment, she told us it was all there was. We could not conceive how the contractor could make such a mistake, and lead us into such a disagreeable situation. We made for the door, with the determination of getting a hearty meal at the first place. A man waiting at the door with a terrible drove with the skin for us to enter which we did, and made him drive furiously to the inn, on the St. Lawrence. Turkeys and geese, that were alive when we arrived, were killed, plucked, roasted, and roasted, and were to

ing put on the table as Col. Moodie and the remainder of the officers entered. The very smell mitigated their anger, and they had to confess that we had more than atoned for the grave mistake we had made, in eating and drinking what was intended as a snack for all—a poor snack for esquimaux like us. Snow-shoes and tobaggans went into store that night; and beef, rum, and biscuit were served out to the men. The rest of the march we had houses to sleep in, and received kind treatment from the inhabitants. We crossed on the ice, and entered Quebec on the 27th day, 1000 strong, without losing a single man; rested ten days, and marched off on tip-toe, for the seat of war in Upper Canada.

"Canada," says the *Army & Navy Gazette*, "will be largely strengthened, and our thoughts are occupied with the safest means of reinforcing her." To which, I beg leave to give the following answer:—I marched from St. John, N. B., to Quebec, nearly half a century ago, when the country was almost in a state of nature, and assisted in bringing through 1000 men, without the loss of a single individual; from which experience, I am perfectly persuaded that troops can now come out in steamers, in the depth of winter, land at St. Andrew's, 50 miles nearer the mouth of the Bay than St. John, and, with the assistance of a Provincial officer, brought safely through to Quebec. Though the later in the season the more difficulty there will be, on account of the snow-drifts, the men not walking on snow-shoes, as we did, but carried by rail and sleighs. I, therefore, confidently assert that the best and shortest route for troops coming from the British Isles to Canada, after the St. Lawrence is closed by ice, is by the Port of St. Andrew's, in the

Bay of Fundy, so long as we are at peace with the United States. It is the most southern port in British America, in latitude $45^{\circ} 4' 13''$ N., and longitude $67^{\circ} 3' 58''$ W. Distance from the Western coast of Ireland 2386 miles, a capacious and safe harbour, open all winter. St. Andrew's is about 370 miles from Quebec (before the Ashburton treaty, by Major Youle's, Royal Engineers, survey, 260), about 200 of which, troops can now be carried by rail, the intermediate space by sleighs, which is the shortest route between the Atlantic and Quebec on British territory. For instance, it is 80 miles shorter than by St. John, and 260 shorter than by Halifax. To support the nautical part of my assertion, I quote a few lines from Admiral Owen. He says:

"I commanded the *Columbia*, a man-of-war steamer, six years on the coasts of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland. I have traversed all the parts between Chignecto or the northern shore and the Bay at all seasons, without danger or difficulty. The navigation is at all times safe, and commodious; and in general, it may be said, it offers greater facilities for safe navigation than common, and much greater than any other parts of the coasts of Nova Scotia or Newfoundland.

W. F. W. OWEN,
Rear Admiral, and late Naval Surveyor of the
Bay of Fundy.

Campobello, Jan. 1, 1850."

The maps examined by me differ in distance. I have as near as possible taken the medium.

I have the honor to be, Sir, Yours, &c.,

A. W. PLAYFAIR.
Bathurst, C. W., Jan. 20, 1862.